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Pecos, 55th Ave. routes would require prehistoric digs

Kerry Fehr-Snyder

The Arizona Republic

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Ancient Native American artifacts likely are buried under the path of the proposed South Mountain Freeway, Phoenix's lead archaeologist and freeway planners agree.

But unlike the now-U.S. 60 built in the early 1970s, construction crews won't be allowed to encase the ruins in asphalt. "That's an old saw," said Todd Bostwick, who has studied the Hohokam people for more than 25 years. "They (crews) have to dig them now." Bostwick said he is virtually sure of Hohokam villages along the proposed 22-mile path for the South Mountain Freeway, which would run west along Pecos Road through part of the South Mountain Preserve and north to 55th Avenue.

Rock art known as petroglyphs are widespread throughout the South Mountain area, leaving Bostwick little doubt that pre-historic Hohokam people settled in the area as early as 300 years before the birth of Christ.

In 1973, crews building the Superstition Freeway (now U.S. 60) unearthed Hohokam pottery shards, remnants of an extensive irrigation system and other relics east of Rural Road along the highway's path. The discovery prompted the federal government to halt construction of a two-mile segment from Rural to Price Road to allow archeologists time to excavate and document the discovery.

Ultimately, the federal government allowed the freeway to be built - but at ground level along that portion rather than below, as originally planned. Freeway planners at the time argued it was better to pave over the Hohokam village rather than find a new alignment for the freeway or stop its construction.

Todd Bostwick, who has studied the ancient Hohokam people for more than 25 years, said that thinking is outdated and that a Phoenix historic preservation ordinance would prevent the same thing from happening today.

"That wouldn't pass for the South Mountain Freeway," he said. "Nowadays, you have a couple of issues: The

state is very strict about doing archeology, and the city of Phoenix (ordinance)."

Tempe didn't have the same protections for archeological sites decades ago when now-U.S. 60 was built.

"Times have gotten much better for archeologists," he said. "They're going to have to do archeology if they build that freeway - both in the mountain and in the flats there."

The Arizona Department of Transportation already has an idea of what lies in the freeway's path.

An ADOT report provided to a freeway advisory group of residents indicates that all seven of the alternative alignments for the South Mountain Freeway "would impact prehistoric and historic cultural resources."

The Pecos Road alignment has the most prehistoric sites at seven, according to the report. The second-largest number of prehistoric sites has been identified along 55th Avenue, which ADOT chose last year as the preferred west-side alignment for the freeway.

"Archeological sites and places considered culturally important by Native American groups would be affected . . . continued operation of the freeway could interfere with ceremonial practices and religious activities of some Native American groups," according to the report.

A final decision over whether to build the 10-lane South Mountain Freeway hasn't been made. ADOT and the Federal Highway Administration are working on a required draft environmental impact statement that will include air, noise, wildlife and cultural resource impacts, among others. It is expected to be released next year.

ADOT spokesman Doug Nintzel declined to elaborate on the report given to the committee, but said those issues would be covered in the environmental impact statement.

"That's a sensitive subject that will be addressed in the draft final report," he said.

That sensitivity includes the need to protect artifacts from people who might try to steal them, he said.

A final construction decision is expected late next year.

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- A2ndgennative
- Posted: Jul 18, 2007 at 6:08 PM
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I support the Pecos road alignment I would hate to see South Mountain tunneled thru. In fact if the reservation would come to terms with ADOT a more southern alignment would be best. Please be sensitive to the prehistoric ruins, and maybe pick up a few soiled disposable diapers the reservation residents dump on their "sacred" land.

- [joe2940](#) | [Profile](#)
- Posted: Jul 18, 2007 at 7:22 PM

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archeologist are respectful of all sites no matter what they may contain however construction workers loot, destroy and hide sites so they stay on schedule - this is mainly so with companies building homes.

- iowa69
- Posted: Jul 19, 2007 at 12:14 AM
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As a kid I never really cared about history, recent or ancient, then I moved to the east coast where US history still lives then to Arizona where prehistoric history lives. The people of the US are too quick to tear down and destroy for the honor of the almighty \$\$\$. Had I known then what I know now I would have become an archeologist, specializing in the southwest. Please save everything you can. Once it is buried under pavement or poachers find it, it is gone forever.

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